



Senator Brad Benson

6th Legislative District



Fall 2005

Please keep in touch:

By mail:

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PO Box 40406
Olympia WA 98504-0406

By e-mail:

Benson.Brad@leg.wa.gov
(Be sure to include your name,
address, and phone number)

By phone:

(360) 786-7610

Via the legislative hotline:

1-800-562-6000

Web Site:

[http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/
SRC/Senators/Benson.htm](http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC/Senators/Benson.htm)

Dear Neighbor:

As your State Senator, I am proud and honored to serve the people of Washington's 6th District, and I am looking forward to making more progress in the 2006 session.

During my first term as Senator, I sponsored a bill aimed at keeping our streets safer by increasing penalties for driving under the influence. I also proposed legislation that would benefit members of the military who may face financial burdens when they are called to duty by giving them time to sort out their finances when they return home.

I am enthusiastic about the 2006 legislative session, and will enjoy continuing to serve the people of Eastern Washington. I encourage you to fill out the survey attached to this newsletter and share with me the issues that are really important to you.

Thank you again for the opportunity to represent you in Olympia. I invite you to contact me anytime via my Olympia office at (360) 786-7610 or by e-mail at Benson.Brad@leg.wa.gov. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Brad Benson in black ink.

Brad Benson
State Senator, 6th District



Meet your 6th District Senator

This is my first term serving as Senator for the 6th District of Washington state. Prior to joining the Senate, I served in the House of Representatives for four terms. It has truly been an honor to serve the people of Eastern Washington.

Before entering into politics, I owned a small business and worked as a Branch Manager, Trust Officer and Assistant Vice President for Seafirst National Bank (now Bank of America). I also serve my country in the Air National Guard. I was a Captain in the Air Force from 1982 to 1988, and now hold the rank of Major in the ANG, 141st Air Refueling Wing based out of Fairchild Air Force Base near Spokane.

I earned a Bachelor of Science degree from California State University and got my Master's degree from the University of Southern California.

When not in session, I serve as a Board Member for the Inland Northwest Technology Education Center (INTEC), I am on several committees at Northview Bible Church, and I am active in Spokane's Hoopfest Tournament. My wife Jill, our four children, Ashley, Patrick, Graham and Hannah, and grandson, Dane, are privileged to be able to continue to work with our community.



Senator Brad Benson is sworn in by Supreme Court Justice Charles Johnson.

2005 Session Highlights

I sponsored a number of bills during the 2005 session, many of them aimed at making our communities safer. While some did not pass, I will continue to be an advocate for these ideas:

SB 5081 – Designed to keep your kids safer by allowing a parent or guardian to monitor a child's telephone conversations.

SB 5129 – Would allow sexually violent predators to be committed.

SB 5215 – Would allow the use of state waterways to fight forest and range fires.

SB 5418 – Helped fight identity theft by restricting who could obtain a copy of a birth certificate and allowed consumers to place a security freeze on their credit report.

SB 5480 – Designed to create tougher penalties for the manufacturing of methamphetamine.

SB 5979 – To change the statute that protects guide and service dogs to include search and rescue dogs.

I invite you to read these and other bill proposals on my web site, <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC/Senators/Benson.htm>.

The State Budget Time to Save!

Every two years, the Legislature passes a biennial state budget, which we did in 2005. We then make mid-term budget adjustments during alternate years, something we will do during the 2006 legislative session.

The majority party increased spending by 12.4% and hiked taxes by a half-billion dollars in the last budget. Those of us who said those increases just weren't necessary were proven right last month when we learned the state's reserve account will stand at more than \$1 billion by the end of 2007.

The rainy day fund should be protected. Your legislators must be fiscally responsible. The pressure to use those funds on new programs will come from all sides, but that would only lead to more budget problems for the next biennium. We need the funds to ensure that Washington is prepared to handle significant and unexpected events, such as a potential lag in the growing construction industry or housing market. That means saying "no" to special interests.

One thing I do believe we should do this year is pay the debt the Legislature ignored last year. The state has a constitutional obligation to fully fund our state's pension system. Last year's budget ignored that obligation and will eventually have to make it up with late penalties and interest. Waiting will only cost taxpayers more in the long run and squeeze future budgets.

I will strongly support making fiscally responsible budget decisions this session, including carefully guarding our state's reserves.



What Can We Do About Health Care?

Rising health care costs are affecting us all. Last session, several bills came before the Legislature that would have forced Washington employers to buy overloaded coverage plans. Those plans would most likely end up costing taxpayers more and driving businesses out of our state.

I believe there are ways to reduce the cost of health care without jeopardizing taxpayer dollars. One idea is to encourage consumers to use health savings accounts that would allow them make their own health care decisions through their own doctors. Another option is to allow consumers to buy insurance poli-



cies tailored to their needs, rather than forcing us to buy expensive Cadillac plans and pay for services we don't want or need. I will continue to support these and other changes that will make health care more affordable for you.

Changes to Medicare

In a few months, the federal government will be implementing a new prescription drug program that could save you money. I'd like to share some of the basics with you to keep you informed of these coming changes.

Beginning January 1st, 2006, your prescription drugs may be covered under insurance by Medicare. You can sign up for the Medicare prescription drug program beginning November 15th.

I want to make sure that you are able to take full advantage of this opportunity to save money on your prescription drug costs. If you have any questions about this new program, feel free to contact me here in Olympia.

Here are the basics of the new Medicare prescription drug plan:

- If you have Medicare Part A and/or Part B, you can join a Medicare prescription drug plan in your area. The type of coverage you have now will determine what your options are.
- Medicare will be working with insurance companies and local pharmacies to offer these new plans.
- If you need more information, visit www.medicare.gov/medicarereform.

If you want more information about this new program, you have several options. You can visit www.medicare.gov and use Medicare's online enrollment center, you can call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) and talk to a Medicare customer service representative (TTY: 1-877-486-2048), or you can ask for an application from the company offering the prescription drug plan you choose.



Where's The Emergency?

When lawmakers pass legislation they are allowed to include a "declaration of emergency" on the bill. That means the bill goes into effect immediately and citizens are not allowed to put the matter to a vote via a referendum. Generally, the intended use of the emergency clause is for a true emergency, such as a threat to the public health.

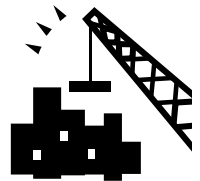
Nearly one-fifth of the bills that

passed the Legislature last year included an emergency clause. In most cases, this was not used for emergencies but to speed up implementation of a law and take away citizens' rights to repeal unpopular legislation.

I oppose the use of the emergency clause when there is no real emergency, and will continue shining the light on the over-use of this practice.

Projects for Spokane

Each year, the state partners with local communities to fund local projects that spur economic development and improve citizens' quality of life. Last year, I helped secure funding for a number of projects that will have a very positive impact on our community, including:



- \$18.5 million to build a new Business and Social Science building at Spokane Falls Community College and provide for additional campus-wide classroom upgrades
- \$31.6 million to build the Intercollegiate College of Nursing at the WSU Riverpoint campus in Spokane
- \$1.5 million for a new mental health evaluation and treatment facility

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Again, thank you for sharing your opinions and comments with me about these very important issues. Please clip this survey and mail it back to my office in Olympia at 106B Newhouse Building, P.O. Box 40406, Olympia, WA 98504-0406.

- ☐ Economy and taxation
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Moral issues
- ☐ Public safety/Law enforcement
- ☐ Government growth
- ☐ Environmental issues
- ☐ Land use and management
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Social services
- ☐ Other: _____

What's On Your Mind?

I would appreciate hearing from you about which issues you feel the Legislature should address in 2006. I've suggested a few, but feel free to write in any issues that aren't listed. I look forward to reading your responses.

Which issues should the Legislature focus on in 2006?

(Please rank, with 1 being the most important)

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